

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

ACTION™

Twists



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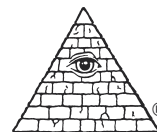
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INTRODUCTION

GURPS Action ranges wide. It spans everything from martial-arts and guns-blazing mayhem, to capers, mysteries, and spy dramas that threaten to become thoughtful. Heroes can shoot, speed, demolish, investigate, snoop, steal, swindle, and more – or focus on supporting all this with technical expertise.

Yet **Action** also sticks to a mold that owes much to exploitation flicks and Cold War technothrillers. Organizations and bosses mostly supply over-the-top assignments and flashy gear. What matters is what the protagonists *do*: Tackle larger-than-life versions of modern-day challenges – solving crimes, hunting terrorists, foiling spies, perpetrating heists.

But the genre's roots were war movies whose heroes saluted and served. Gangster flicks about loyalty to the boss. Pulp that threw in the mummy's curse, and marooned explorers on islands aswarm with giant animals. Westerns whose banditos abandoned good guys in the desert without water, much less guns.

GURPS Action 8: Twists draws inspiration from these origins to mix up contemporary action.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to hundreds of **GURPS** releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as lead creator of the **GURPS Action** and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series; work on the latter led to his design of the **Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game**, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour*, Geneviève.

SERVICE, STRANGENESS, AND SURVIVAL

Here are three game-changers for your **GURPS Action** campaign:

Part of Something Bigger (pp. 4-5) deepens the social dimension of **Action**, making the PCs' place within an organization or wider society more important. "You can shoot, Major, but can you *command*?"

Things Just Got Weird (pp. 6-8) zooms past merely "cinematic" to "exotic" and "supernatural," challenging heroes with

enemies from outside their experience. "That *thing* wiped out an entire squad!"

No-Tech Thriller (pp. 8-10) explores situations where the protagonists have no gear and must rely on wits and luck to survive. "All that kit just slows me down."

These ideas could fill supplements, and do: Each essay suggests applicable **GURPS** titles. But the focus is on stripping things down for **Action** – on rules simplifications and tips for GMs.

For further twists, adapt the campaign-level options from "Pulp Action!" (*Pyramid* #3/8: *Cliffhangers*, pp. 4-10), "Transhuman Action!" (*Pyramid* #3/15: *Transhuman Space*, pp. 4-11), or "Extended Action!" (*Pyramid* #3/53: *Action*, pp. 9-14) to a single adventure.

If it bleeds, we can kill it.
– *Predator* (1987)

ABOUT GURPS

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

The *GURPS Action* hero's social role is typically summed up by some sort of Rank (pp. B29-30) alongside a Duty – and, for agents of order, Legal Enforcement Powers that work as *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*, p. 25 describes. Caper-loving crooks have Contacts at most. And that's fine for campaigns about chases, shootouts, and explosions!

Yet the stars of long-running action franchises climb the chain of command. Sensitive situations require security clearances reserved for senior staff. "Retired" heroes may have the particular set of skills needed to rescue someone close or tackle old-school problems. Vigilantes and jewel thieves are often wealthy and influential in their public lives.

The point? While *Action* downplays its protagonists' place in society, that can become instrumental to the campaign.



MOVING ON UP

Most real-world promotions result from working enough hours, but action heroes can gain Rank through deeds alone. *After Action* (*GURPS Action 2: Exploits*, pp. 46-47) offers one approach: Critically succeed at a suitable skill roll, roll 1d, and on a 6, get free Rank.

Alternatively, characters can *buy* Rank. To tie this to deeds, link it to what deeds earn PCs: character points. Per *Heroes*, starting characters – worth 250 points – can begin with Rank 0-4. Each 50 points earned permits buying another level:

Rank	0-4	5	6	7	8
Minimum Points	250	300	350	400	450

For Rank 5+, points are *before* buying Rank; e.g., someone who desires Rank 5 must reach 300 points and *then* improve Rank.

The main use for Rank is *Pulling Rank* (*Heroes*, pp. 24-25), which grows more likely to succeed as Rank increases. In more "social" campaigns, *GURPS Social Engineering: Pulling Rank* is heartily recommended. That expansion offer many more *Action*-friendly options for Assistance Rolls!

There are other effects, however.

Listen Up, Maggots!

Add Rank as a bonus to Diplomacy, Propaganda, and Public Speaking *when its holder speaks for the Rank-granting organization*. This represents extensive practice, speeches prepared by PR experts, sophisticated propaganda techniques, or outright intimidation. Directors and generals are taken more seriously than interchangeable minions and private soldiers! Intimidation and Leadership get the same bonus when commanding lower-Rank underlings. The GM may extend this to *any* "social" skill roll made in an official capacity.

Treat Rank as a Will bonus when *resisting* Influence rolls targeting the organization through its representative; e.g., a cop with Police Rank 3 resists criminal Intimidation at +3.

In internal struggles, apply *both* modifiers. A Rank 7 general enjoys a five-step edge over a Rank 2 sergeant when either tries an Influence roll.

Pay Grades

Better pay is a coveted feature of higher Rank in real life. The GM should let players spend points to improve Wealth for use with *Personal Wealth* and *Pocket Money* (*Heroes*, p. 27) – i.e., for off-the-books gear and cash – up to these levels:

Rank	Wealth Level	Rank	Wealth Level
0-1	Average	5-7	Wealthy
2-4	Comfortable	8	Very Wealthy

Purchasing Wealth is *optional*. Mighty leaders can be lousy money managers – or true believers who waive high pay. Thus, a PC who earns Rank 5 may choose to spend the points to become Wealthy, but that isn't mandatory.

Wealth higher than Rank suggests may trigger accusations of favoritism or corruption. Each excess Wealth level gives -1 to rolls to fight such smear campaigns and, in *Personal Wealth* woes, worsens the +2 to investigations by +1 and the -2 to ARs and Law (Police) by -1. For instance, for a Rank 1 officer with Very Wealthy, the modifiers are -3, +5, and -5.

BORN RICH

Those *without* Rank (not even Rank 0) can buy whatever Wealth their points allow. This again works as described in *Personal Wealth* and *Pocket Money* (*Heroes*, p. 27) – but now the hero doesn't experience downsides for using personal gear.

STATUS?

In *Action*, Status uses a variation on *Classless Meritocracies* (p. B28): It's imputed by Rank (+1 Status at Rank 2-4, +2 at Rank 5-7, +3 at Rank 8+) and Wealth (+1 Status for Wealthy through Filthy Rich, +2 for Multimillionaire 1, +3 for Multimillionaire 2+). *Example*: A Military Rank 7 general who's Wealthy enjoys Status 3.

Organized Crime Rank counts! In modern-day action, Status is not the mark of lawful rulers; that's Administrative Rank. Status is about big houses, fancy cars, servants, and the right clubs and invitations – all facets of what puts the “lord” in “crime lord.”

What does Status *do*? Anyone may claim the resources in *What Cost of Living Gets You* (p. B266) for up to their Status level. *Action* ignores the rules for jobs (p. B516) and cost of living (p. B265). The hero's work – i.e., their adventures – somehow pays for this stuff.

The catch? The hero can't claim a level higher than their Wealth indicates on p. B517. Thus, our Status 3 general, who's merely Wealthy, could have at most a Status 2

lifestyle. The GM may let PCs *buy* one or two additional levels of Status for this purpose, but only those with great Wealth are likely to *want* this.

Can the material trappings of Status be used on adventures? Yes, but . . .

They aren't Signature Gear! Dragging these things into the action makes them fair game for bad guys, who can torch houses, blow up vehicles, murder staff, etc. Replacements cost money the player must somehow obtain in play.

If PCs with Rank other than Organized Crime Rank detain prisoners in their residences, use personal vehicles in chases, deputize bodyguards, etc., they'll face consequences identical to those for taking personal gear to work; see *Personal Wealth* (*Heroes*, p. 27).

It's fine to exploit Status *as Status*, though. If an adventure involves getting into a high-society party, leveraging Status is consequence-free even on official business.

CRIMINALS

Mobsters have Organized Crime Rank. For PCs, this is linked to point totals as in *Moving On Up* (p. 4), enables *Pulling Rank* (for Backup, Bailout, Cash, False ID, Replacement Gear, Safe House, and criminal Facilities like chop shops), helps rolls to speak for the mob or command subordinates (usually with Intimidation, Savoir-Faire (Mafia), or Streetwise), and aids Will rolls to resist being “leaned on” by police or rivals. Ignore *Pay Grades* (p. 4); use *Born Rich* (p. 5) instead. Begin the social traits on the criminal lens (*Heroes*, p. 4) with:

Social Traits: Mobsters *must* take their template's Duty and *may* spend some of its advantage points (or leftover lens points) on Organized Crime Rank 0-4 [5/level].

Choosing Savoir-Faire (Mafia) as a lens skill is a prerequisite for Rank 1+.

Independent criminals just use *Born Rich*. Still, the GM can relate Wealth to point total. This represents loot from previous heists making *Personal Wealth* and *Pocket Money* (*Heroes*, p. 27) more generous without bean-counting:

Points	Wealth Level	Points	Wealth Level
250	Comfortable	400	Filthy Rich
300	Wealthy	450+	Multimillionaire 1
350	Very Wealthy		

Even if the PC saves no *cash* from heists, they can spend *points* to improve Wealth to the indicated level for use on later adventures. If they already have that Wealth or higher, ignore this!

The criminal lens also allows for Contacts and Contact Groups. These are available to both independent and organized criminals, and represent *personal* relationships, unrelated to point total, Rank, or Wealth. When deepening the campaign's social dimension, they should matter more – *strongly* consider using *GURPS Social Engineering: Keeping in*

Contact, which does for Contacts what *Pulling Rank* does for Rank. When choosing among that supplement's categories: Criminal/Street fits best, but Business/Commercial (money laundering), Cultural/Ethnic (e.g., the *Italian* mob), Fraternal (like *tongs*), High Society (for high-Wealth gangsters), Low Class (for slumdogs), and Regional (the old country – or the ‘hood) work, too.

SOCIAL ADVENTURES

When using these guidelines, the GM should occasionally run adventures that require *GURPS Social Engineering* and *especially GURPS Boardroom and Curia* and *GURPS Mass Combat*.

Boardroom and Curia rates the capabilities of Rank-granting bodies, and suggests Contacts and Wealth levels for their members. Intelligence Rank goes with government, investigative, or secret organizations; Military Rank, with military ones; Organized Crime Rank, with criminal or secret ones; Police Rank, with enforcement or investigative ones; and Security Rank, with enforcement, government, investigative, or secret ones. For worked, action-friendly examples, see *GURPS Boardroom and Curia: Tomorrow Rides* and “The Company” (*Pyramid* #4/2: *Modern/Action I*, pp. 28-31). Enthusiasts of *conspiratorial* action featuring shadowy organizations will want the rules modifications in “Conspiracy in Action!” (*Pyramid* #3/59: *Conspiracies*, pp. 4-8).

Mass Combat is great for large-scale action (which is still action!) involving anything from street gangs to actual troops. It matters most to PCs with Military Rank, and defines typical unit sizes commanded at each level – although you wouldn't call it “command” below Rank 3. For a lighter alternative, use the BATTLE rules from *GURPS Action 7: Mercenaries*.

If the campaign moves toward social, organizational, or martial adventures, allow *all* PCs to spend earned points on the skills these supplements call for.

THINGS JUST GOT WEIRD

GURPS Action is unequivocal about a few things: It has no room for the paranormal, reserves advanced TLs for cutting-edge MacGuffins, and never involves Fright Checks for the supernatural. See *Ten Rules to Use Sparingly (GURPS Action 2: Exploits*, p. 44).

Some action flicks flout this advice. *Predator* features cinematic gunplay, mercenaries versus guerrillas, Arnold Schwarzenegger, . . . and an extraterrestrial trophy hunter. *From Dusk Till Dawn* is by-the-book grindhouse action until its violent criminals enter a vampire-filled roadhouse. *Planet Terror* mixes its grindhouse action with zombies. *Big Trouble in Little China* has gang wars and nonstop martial-arts violence – plus *qi*-fueled weirdness and Chinese black magic. And so on.

There's a tradition of conventional action protagonists – detectives, criminals, spies, soldiers, etc. – encountering aliens, monsters, superhuman powers, or other strangeness *they weren't prepared for*. **GURPS** is made for such situations! Here's some "how to" advice. It assumes a standard **Action** campaign that turns weird temporarily; for heroes who battle the implausible as a career, follow the advice in "The X-Terminators" (*Pyramid* #3/5: *Horror & Spies*, pp. 4-9) or run **GURPS Monster Hunters** instead.



CHOOSE YOUR WRINKLE

When deciding what weirdness shows up, there's a Golden Rule: "Stay focused." If the situation has multiple facets, these should be related (e.g., stereotypical aliens have ultra-tech and maybe psionics, but *not* magic) – heroes who aren't experts on this stuff face enough of a challenge

without dividing their efforts! The following have precedents in action cinema:

Aliens. Extraterrestrials have unpleasant plans for humanity. The scale can range from one alien (whose atrocities initially resemble those of a terrorist, rogue jungle commando, or serial criminal) to an impending invasion (which won't happen if the heroes silence its scouts). Advanced technology is customary; see **GURPS Ultra-Tech** and the **GURPS Spaceships** series. The visitors typically possess unusual personal capabilities, too, ranging from exceptional toughness to psionics (in **GURPS Psionic Powers**). Depict psi as "the aliens happen to be psis" – not as "you're facing aliens *and* psionics."

Ancient Secrets. Some culture's stories about mystical powers – typically black magic (from **GURPS Horror**, **GURPS Magic**, or **GURPS Thaumatology**) or *chi* (see **GURPS Martial Arts**) – are true, and someone is abusing this. Entanglements with ethnic gangs or underground fight clubs rapidly turn weird. Avoid exploitation: When including an evil Vodou sorcerer, remember that not all Haitians follow Vodou and not all Vodouists are *bokors*. When borrowing weirdness from Chinese martial arts, don't depict those arts as innately malevolent, nor their secrets as known to everyone of Chinese ancestry.

Homo Superior. There's a strain of humanity – possibly artificial (**GURPS Bio-Tech** offers many ideas) – with extraordinary powers. They might be psis ripped straight out of *Scanners*, or closer to supers; see **Psionic Powers** or **GURPS Supers**, respectively. What at first resembles conspiracy, espionage, or hyper-competent criminality proves to be something more worrisome. The powers and their users *can* be "all evil, all the time," because they aren't real; being superhuman might mean having little empathy for the merely human.

Metal as Hell. If you want all magic to be black magic wielded by sinister people, tap into the Satanic Panic. Scratch the surface of extreme body modification, backmasked messages on rock albums, and underground clubs, and you find troublemakers who'd be bad news *without* evil powers: pushing adulterated drugs, smuggling humans, killing for thrills, etc. That's who the heroes *think* they're up against. But some of these miscreants have crossed the line into something right out of **Horror**, complete with working magic; **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic** and **GURPS Magical Styles: Horror Magic** are good fits.

Science! Mad science blends well with action – ask James Bond. All you need is for a careless or unethical researcher to develop AI, or to clone dinosaurs from prehistoric DNA, and then develop a god complex or lose control over their creation. Pick any TL9-12 or superscience innovation from **Bio-Tech** or **Ultra-Tech**, and have it go as wrong as possible. Spies or counterespies stealing or investigating tech secrets are the most likely to get involved – but soldiers could confront *super-soldiers*, while detectives might investigate unethical tech conglomerates.

Undead Plague. A subset of bizarre tech or black magic is a zombie infestation; see **GURPS Zombies**. The focus isn't on the aliens or scientists behind the technology, or the magicians behind the sorcery, but on their self-perpetuating creations.

The monsters enter the heroes' world via reports of hideous bloodshed – at street level for cops or criminals, in a war-torn hellhole for soldiers. Another option is vampires, who are subtler and more powerful; security or intelligence operatives might uncover them while unraveling high-level conspiracies.

OPENING ATROCITIES

As the examples suggest, weirdness initially manifests as mundane badness: If everyone who enters the jungle vanishes, the suspects are guerrillas – not dinosaurs or extraterrestrials. More brazen criminals pursuing bigger scores implies a new boss – not a magician, mutant, or vampire. Sudden deaths near Tomorrow Today Labs® are due to lax safety measures – not nano-swarms with emergent AI. People are getting their faces eaten off by drug fiends – not zombies.

That is what the heroes sign up for.

Criminals get orders from a boss concerned about competition, a frameup, or losing face. Law enforcers are assigned murders or missing-persons cases. Military types are sent after terrorists or insurgents. Spies receive missions concerning worrisome new capabilities on the Other Side.

Up to this point, the adventure plays out exactly as in *Exploits*. Then, while gathering information (*Exploits*, pp. 11-17), something doesn't add up. Handle this by having one BAD for the *apparent* mission and another that's 1d+1 steps (-2 to -7) worse for the weirder reality. When someone makes a fact-finding roll by enough to overcome the more severe BAD, they get a hunch: "Something isn't right."

At that point, the GM *could* follow *Planning* (*Exploits*, p. 17) and have an Intelligence Analysis or Criminology roll made at the worse BAD reveal that the mission isn't what it seems. That's still a good fallback if the next suggestion doesn't motivate the players.

It's more *fun* if this is when the PCs have their first brush with the uncanny. Don't have aliens, monsters, powers, or tech destroy them. Inflict that fate on hapless NPCs and have the heroes witness the aftermath. Those who make Perception or Observation rolls at the worse BAD *glimpse* some of what happens; hackers and wire rats can use technical skills at that penalty to recover security footage after the fact. Anyone with Intuition can try an IQ roll at that penalty to guess.

THE INFORMED GUIDE

Since action heroes aren't trained to hunt aliens and vampires, they'll be out of their element. If they're smart, they'll seek somebody who can explain what's going on; use *Finding a Client* (*Exploits*, p. 6) or any suitable approach from *Social Engineering* (*Exploits*, pp. 15-17). Rolls are subject to the harsher BAD – finding experts on the theory behind black magic or superscience isn't easy!

Success by 5+ or critical success finds an expert: an ex-government MIB who knows about the alien menace, a defector from the cult or secret lab, a mystic, or whoever suits the situation. This person possesses a key skill of value – Hidden Lore, Thaumatology, Weird Science, etc. – that the PCs don't and *can't* have.

Lesser success finds someone knowledgeable but not specially skilled: a genuine alien abductee, the sole survivor of a

zombie massacre, an escaped test subject, etc. They can provide inside dope but not learned expertise. This removes the additional BAD, which is mostly due to the heroes having the wrong idea.

Failure – or not looking – means the prying heroes have further, progressively deadlier brushes with the weird as they pursue their original mission or try to fight the unknown armed with nothing but good intentions. They may attempt to seek help again after each encounter.

Critical failure finds a crank; e.g., a self-professed alien abductee, even if the truth is unrelated to extraterrestrials. They lead the protagonists down the wrong path, worsening BAD. Each time this makes life difficult, the PCs get a Detect Lies or Psychology roll – or a use of Empathy – to figure out they're being misled.

DOING WHAT YOU CAN WITH WHAT YOU GOT

The heroes will thus have successive encounters with the weird peril. These proceed as usual (*Exploits*, pp. 31-39), except that the opposition has extraordinary ways to fight back. For these, use the standard rules from relevant *GURPS* supplement(s); e.g., scary monsters inflict Fright Checks, sorcerers use magic, and aliens brandish lasers, blasters, or disintegrators.

Enemy ability levels vary. A loner, like a cloned *Spinosaurus* or solitary alien scout, is inevitably a boss. Small groups – say, cabals of magicians or squads of super-soldiers – consist entirely of henchmen or bosses. Larger ones (cults, sinister corporations, UFO crews, etc.) have mooks, too. Hordes, especially zombies, might *only* have mooks. Start from the guidelines in *Enemies* (*Exploits*, pp. 45-46) and add "weird abilities" *on top*; levels of strange skills are comparable to those of mundane skills.

As for the heroes . . .

Violence Is a Solution

Many weird opponents are no tougher than mundane ones. The threat is what they can *do* – not what they can *withstand*. Heroes who get a shot at them can prevail in combat.

Still, some ultra-tech or supernatural defenses can defeat typical weapons. Hordes or high-HP monsters might not drop fast enough to prevent catastrophe. In those cases, it's time for heavy weapons – an excuse to unleash high explosives, machine guns, rockets, and even borrowed artillery, tanks, or warplanes! Obtaining these calls for an Assistance Roll (*GURPS Action 1: Heroes*, pp. 24-25) for gear or fire support, typically at a penalty for being "especially inappropriate" until the heroes acquire proof (using *Exploits*, pp. 11-14 at the elevated BAD), which flips this to a bonus.

Don't Double-Dip

As usual, in chases and combat, BAD doesn't penalize the heroes – it sets enemy skill levels. Yet there are other forms of conflict! If the PCs already have a penalty due to TL differences (-5 per advanced TL) or a default for a skill they have no way of knowing (-4 to -7), use only the *worse* of this or BAD.

Surprising Even Themselves

Once the heroes have successfully researched the enemy or survived a brush, they get skill defaults reserved for people who've witnessed whatever the skill deals with; e.g., an IQ-7 default for Thaumatology (p. B225) after facing black magicians. If the skill has *no* default, they can spend a character point to attempt a default roll; the default penalty is -4 if the skill is Easy, -5 if Average, -6 if Hard, or -7 if Very Hard. For example, if Weird Science (IQ/VH) is needed to grasp alien controls, this buys an IQ-7 roll. It is acceptable to spend more points on *Buying Success* (p. B347).

Heroes can also spend points to invoke a suitable advantage *for a single scene*. This requires a point per 5 points that trait costs, rounded up; e.g., using 4 points for temporary access to High TL 4 [20] in a TL8 campaign allows operating TL12 gizmos without TL penalties, while 1 point can bestow fleeting Magery 0 [5] to let a PC use a "mage only" artifact. This extends to defenses; e.g., against mind-bending psis, 4 points can provide Mind Shield 5 [20] for a single battle.

This rule requires the heroes to have an idea of what they're facing! Only then can they can grit their teeth to shrug off curses, or hack a UFO with a PowerBook 5300.

There's Always a Weakness

The enemy should have a "back door" that allows defeat by heroes who favor cunning over explosions and guesswork. For instance, supernatural monsters fear holy water, silver, being staked through the heart, etc. Aliens might be vulnerable to the common cold – or have no firewall on their starship's computer.

The trick is to discover this. The usual way is for *The Informed Guide* (p. 7) to use their special skill and instruct the PCs – who must keep their pet nerd alive while they investigate. Or perhaps the heroes divine the enemy's general nature and spend a point to make such a roll, *Surprising*

Even Themselves (above). If the deck is *really* stacked against the good guys – they are clueless, can't get heavy weapons, and are by all rights hosed – the GM can use up everybody's Serendipity to have them collectively "get lucky." The GM might even relent and give a free clue, but also have BAD apply *in combat* when trying to capitalize on it.

Action isn't a subtle genre, so such weaknesses can be stereotypical. As the heroes and players ostensibly live in the same world, it stands to reason that if the players could conclude, say, "Zombies! Aim for the head!", then so could their competent alter-egos. Thus, the GM may ignore the warnings in *PC Knowledge* (p. B495).

AFTER ACTION

The heroes have defeated the weird enemy and saved the world, or at least themselves. Does the campaign stay weird?

No.

The grand finale restores normality! Weird tech and sinister artifacts vanish with their owners; so do bizarre corpses or other evidence. They might be incinerated by the heroes' napalm, self-destruct, rapidly decompose, return to Hell, or get "beamed up." If the GM prefers, the PCs' organization or government MIBs can swoop in and sterilize the scene. Whatever happens, no proof remains.

Temporary abilities the heroes willed into existence with points are forgotten. Nobody retains such knowledge, powers, or mutations.

In effect, "it was all just a dream," or like the Halloween episode of a TV show. Afterward, it's back to regular action. The weirdness is never mentioned again – well, not until the GM tosses in another twist!

If the players *really* want to continue down that road, transition to "The X-Terminators" (in *Pyramid* #3/5) or **Monster Hunters**.

No-TECH THRILLER

The action and technothriller genres are linked, the latter a near-subset of the former since the 1960s. **GURPS Action** embraces this.

Hackers and wire rats were *born* in the technothriller. Infiltrators and investigators use spy-tech for intrusion and surveillance. Cleaners, demolition men, and medics depend on tools and chemicals. Wheel men are gearheads. Assassins and shooters know every detail about every gun. Face men aren't *as* tech-reliant, but love electronic media. Only martial artists (from **GURPS Action 3: Furious Fists**) welcome low technology – well, except for techno-ninjas, and traceurs who clamber around urban infrastructure.

Action gear is for technothrillers, too. The equipment list in **GURPS Action 1: Heroes** makes this explicit, and **GURPS Action 6: Tricked-Out Rides** is a monument to stuffing gadgetry into cars.

And **GURPS Action 2: Exploits** privileges technological tasks. It assumes that action heroes start every adventure by choosing a high-tech loadout (**Exploits**, pp. 6-7). Then it offers rules for hacking, driving vehicles, cracking safes, blowing

things up, electronic communications, surveillance, and security – and even for fighting robots and disarming nukes!

This focus makes replacing the *technothriller* with the *no-tech* thriller a real surprise – and a fun diversion, if done right.

How Did This Happen?

Decide how your tech-toting action heroes ended up without their toys. Some classics:

Captured! Fictional heroes are often stripped of equipment after losing a battle, being surrounded by overwhelming opposition, or getting hoodwinked or kidnapped. Ordinary crooks might rob them, leaving them in their skivvies in the wilderness. Twisted villains may have a round of "The Most Dangerous Game" planned. If the PCs are the criminals – or captured spies – they could be "saved" when their prison bus rolls and burns, or even escape a gulag, in the wastelands.

Stranded! Shipwrecks, plane crashes, or that unfortunate prisoner transport accident can leave action protagonists without gear but happy to escape with their lives. They're a great way to use tech (vehicles) to eliminate itself.

Undercover. The heroes might be *assigned* a no-tech challenge. Detectives and spies, especially, are sometimes ordered to get close to security-conscious or paranoid enemies who'd never let gadgetry near them. If the boss is a guerrilla leader in the jungle or an oil baron based someplace right out of a 19th-century Western, there may be call to operate gear-free – at least initially.

From My Cold, Dead Hands

These setups assume the players will go along with “forced plays” like surrendering, diving from burning wrecks, or being ordered on missions where they can't bring gear. Yet some gamers will have their alter-egos fight to the death, remain aboard a crashing plane, or refuse assignments. Sometimes that's in genre – but not when it's *stupid*.

The GM can address this with a stick: Take the mission or get fired, lose your Rank, and gain your former organization as an Enemy. Die. And so on. That tends to end the campaign.

More diplomatic is the carrot: A planned assignment comes with pre-mission training in, say, outdoor skills, worth 5-10 “free” points (*Special Training*, p. 10). Surrendering to bad guys or bailing out of a vehicle earns bonus points. Yes, the players may hold out for this – and so what? Without hardware, they'll *need* the boost!

Signature Gear

see p. B85

Signature Gear does *not* promise, “You'll never be without this item!” The guarantee is that if the gear is stolen or confiscated, the GM must provide an opportunity to recover it. If it's permanently lost, the GM has to replace the points or the equipment.

Successful completion of a no-tech thriller grants this, but that needn't be early on. It might be seconds before the climactic battle; e.g., hunted heroes fight their way out of the woods, infiltrate the villain's hunting lodge, and find their stuff as the boss and his men walk in. It could be in the aftermath; e.g., the PC stabs the villain with a pointed stick and pries their prized gewgaw from his dying grasp. It may even be after returning home: the Company replaces lost gear, or returns safely stored items.

Gizmos

see pp. B57-58

When the heroes are supposedly tech-free, limit each Gizmo to:

- A no-tech artifact – like a pointed stick or sharp rock – even without suitable skills.
- A one-use high-tech *consumable*: match, candy (to negate starvation FP), etc.

NO-TECH ACTION

What do heroes roaming the wilds do? Here are quick-and-dirty reductions of some *Basic Set* rules, for use on

larger-than-life adventures without tech. Groups with **GURPS *Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures*** can use *its* streamlined rules – minus the fanciful and the magical.

The Same, Only Different

No-tech action can be standard action with wilderness flair: *Subtlety* (*Exploits*, pp. 9-10) is limited to basic stealth, camouflage, and silent communication; surveillance (*Exploits*, p. 12) sans tech means sneaking up close; *Climbing* (*Exploits*, pp. 18-19) is done without gear, but at +5 in trees with lots of branches; *Parkour* (*Exploits*, pp. 19-20) is useful for hurdling crevasses and quicksand, skidding across ice, and so on; and *First Aid* (*Exploits*, p. 40) is at -5 with only bandages torn from clothing.

No-Tech Hazards

GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger offers quick-and-brutal rules covering nasty plants and animals, falling trees and rocks, wet and slippery environments, abandoned buildings in the middle of nowhere, rusty implements to find inside (or to arm lumberjacks, miners, etc. on the villains' payroll), and so on. Without this or another **GURPS** supplement, treat quicksand, venomous snakes, and similar dangers as damage rolls: Someone *almost* perishes, but their allies rescue them.

Hiking

The GM sets an arbitrary time between events of interest, and the heroes try to beat it. Make a team Hiking roll, as in *Hoofing It* (*Exploits*, p. 8). Optionally, one person can use each of Meteorology and *either* Area Knowledge for the region or Navigation (Land) as complementary skills.

Critical success at Hiking buys extra time that lets the PCs scout, craft weapons, prepare an ambush, etc. Success means arriving in time for the next scene. Failure, turning up winded (everybody is down 1d FP when the scene starts) or late (the bad guys are extra-prepared: -1 BAD in that scene). Critical failure *also* indicates a catastrophe – suited to the terrain – for a random team member.

If the sole objective is to return to base or civilization, roll as above – but now any success brings the group a day closer, failure means an extra day in the wilds, rolling for *Survival* (below), and critical failure *still* adds a catastrophe.

Survival

On adventures lasting more than a day:

Foraging: Roll daily against Fishing (if there's water), Naturalist, or Survival *for the team*, modified using *Got You Covered* (*Exploits*, p. 5). For barren areas, penalties as stiff as -5 apply – or BAD, if enemies put the PCs there. Any success feeds everybody. Failure costs everyone 1 FP that can't be recovered without food; critical failure, 1d HP due to eating something ill-advised.

Camping: Roll nightly against Survival for the team, applying *Got You Covered*. Bad weather gives up to -5. Any success means nothing bad. Failure costs everyone 1 FP that can't be recovered without rest. Critical failure indicates either 1d HP from exposure or a night raid by the opposition.

Remember: Survival is at -3 in the wrong terrain type (p. B224).

Capturing Gear

While no-tech thrillers gradually become ordinary adventures as the heroes take gear off defeated mooks, remember:

1. Tasks unrelated to that gear remain difficult. A gun can't bandage wounds or eavesdrop on distant enemies.
2. Mook-quality gear is rarely good. Making it outdated, cheap, or damaged is entirely fair.
3. Gear captured in combat may break – especially if its owners were beaten with sticks or crushed by a deadfall. *Repairs (Exploits, pp. 41-42)* are at -10 without tools.

Sneaking Around the Bushes

Tracking: Trailing bad guys should succeed or the adventure won't happen. It needn't be easy, though! The group may try a Tracking roll, at -2 in arctic, desert, or mountains, or -4 in swampland. Any success lets them follow the trail. Failure means slow progress: -1 to BAD as the enemy pulls ahead (and, optionally, more Hiking rolls). Critical failure *also* means a mook ambush.

Scouting: Reconnaissance involves a few team members individually rolling against Stealth – or the group sticking together and using their *lowest* Stealth at -5. These are Quick Contests against enemy Perception or Observation. Winning gathers intelligence; losing warns the enemy, who might attack, sound the alarm, or prepare for the heroes (-1 to BAD).

Signaling: Mimicry (Animal Sounds or Bird Calls) can deliver a prearranged signal to warn others. Any failure means it isn't heard.

Traps: Outdoor traps still use *Exploits*, pp. 22-23, 25. Only deadfalls, pits, sharpened stakes, etc. are likely without tech, though; all are set using the Traps skill. The enemy may have mines, tripwire weapons, and other technological surprises, which involve the usual skills and rules.

Ambushes: These may be set by or for PCs; below, figure NPC skill levels from BAD, as usual. Moving ambushers use their squad's worst Stealth vs. the enemy's best Hearing or Vision; stationary ones, their team's best Camouflage vs. the opposition's best Vision. If the ambushers win the Quick Contest, they achieve partial surprise (p. B393) and may choose the encounter's range band (*Exploits*, p. 31). Run combat normally – but if surprise occurred, those who suffered it are mentally stunned and must take Do Nothing maneuvers to make IQ rolls to recover, at +1 per turn after the first and +6 for Combat Reflexes. Until they succeed, they can only do that and defend at -4, without retreating. Ambushes



with Danger Sense get a Per roll; success means *they* aren't mentally stunned and enjoy full active defenses, while critical success gives *their side* these benefits.

Pointed Sticks

Most action heroes will arm themselves! Stones for throwing or use as fist loads are freely available. Sticks strong enough to serve as batons, clubs, quarterstaves, etc. call for Scrounging or Per-based Armoury (Melee Weapons). To grind stones into "knives" or sharpen sticks into spears, roll Armoury (Melee Weapons) again. Makeshift bows, slings, etc. use Armoury (Missile Weapons). Where rolls are needed, any failure yields a weapon that breaks on its first attack or parry in combat.

All but rocks count as "cheap" for breakage. Primitive cutting or impaling weapons also have -1 to damage and armor divisor (0.5), doubling target DR.

Wild Behavior

Chases and combat use Chapter 4 of *Exploits*. The heroes will be relying on DX-based Running in chases. They'll need to achieve Close range to use fists and pointed sticks, or Short range to lob rocks and spears. Fighting works normally – though not every PC will have Spear, Staff, Throwing, Thrown Weapon, and similar skills.

SKILLS

Unless the heroes are bushwhackers, cowboys, recon or survival experts, etc. created with *GURPS Action 4: Specialists*, they're likely to be using numerous skills at default. That's a big part of the no-tech challenge!

Another facet is using technological skills without gear. This inflicts the penalties on p. B345. See also *Capturing Gear* (above).

Default and equipment penalties are cumulative with BAD, if applicable! On the other hand, *Buying Lucky Breaks (Exploits, p. 41)* is permitted *even in combat* when heroes without tech face foes who have it.

Special Training

Heroes assigned a no-tech mission might be trained for it. Likely skills are those for outdoor activities, unarmed combat, and primitive weapons.

Cooperation

The GM should be openminded about allowing *Got You Covered (Exploits, p. 5)* for no-tech tasks if it's even *vaguely* plausible that suitably skilled heroes could help their allies.

Make Everyone Useful

Some heroes – especially hackers and wire rats – have comparatively little to offer on a no-tech adventure (though high IQ is great for defaults). The GM should make sure that when the squad eventually reaches the bad guys' stronghold, there are essential tasks that *need* technological knowhow: repairing a generator, using a damaged radio, cracking the boss's safe, fixing up an escape vehicle, etc.

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